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RUEH AR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 2044
RUEH DS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 2165
RUEH RL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0707
RUEH BY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1442
RUEH DK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 1800
RUEH KM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 2221
RUEH NR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 4652
RUEA IIA/CIA WASHDC
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK
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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1311
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000510

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR S. HILL
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR E. LOKEN AND L. DOBBINS
STATE PASS TO NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/13/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S VISIT TO MASHONALAND EAST

REF: A. HARARE 503
[1](#)B. HARARE 474

Classified By: Ambassador James McGee for reason 1.4(d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU) On June 12, 2008, Ambassador McGee, the Dutch Charge d'Affaires, two poloffs, RSO, DATT, and three FSNs visited two locations in Mashonaland East Province: a Church of Christ mission hospital in Nhowe and the town of Mutoko, about 120km east of Harare. The trip confirmed significantly increased police presence and widespread distribution of ZANU-PF campaign materials, as well as a fearful population. While Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) allowed Mission staff to travel, ZRP and/or intelligence vehicles followed the convoy after the delegation made their presence known at the Mutoko police station, as requested by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). END SUMMARY.

Doctors deny presence of violence victims in hospital

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Embassy contingent first visited the Church of Christ's Mission hospital in Nhowe, a rural area in Mashonaland East. The Church is supported by religious groups in the U.S., NGOs, and the Government of Zimbabwe. The hospital administrator said the 54-bed hospital, which has a staff of two doctors and 14 nurses, treats mainly HIV/AIDS patients. The hospital has a caseload of about 2,000-3,000 patients per month; most patients have HIV/AIDS-related illnesses. The hospital also dispenses Anti-Retro Virals, although it has an insufficient supply. Because the hospital is relatively well-staffed for a Zimbabwean hospital, and because its funding allows it to source drugs, it receives patients from as far away as Harare (over 100 kilometers).

[1](#)3. (C) Ambassador McGee asked whether the hospital had seen

many victims of violence. The hospital administrator claimed uneasily that they did not currently have any victims of violence in the hospital. He also denied there had been much violence in the surrounding area. The Ambassador asked if we could tour the hospital. The hospital administrator indicated he would prefer that we did not.

¶4. (C) After our conversation with the administrator, we spoke with hospital security guards on the grounds outside the hospital. They indicated there had been significant violence in the rural areas of Mashonaland East near the hospital and that a number of victims had been and were currently being treated in the hospital. One guard, who was also affiliated with the Zimbabwe Republic Police, noted there was a general climate of fear in the area. He said his commanding police officer had instructed all police to vote by postal ballot (the equivalent of an absentee ballot); the ballots would be filled out under a supervisor's direction and voters would be instructed to vote for ZANU-PF.

Rural ghost towns

¶5. (U) Departing the hospital, the convoy drove north on a dirt road through several very small towns. We noted empty fields, stunted cotton plants, sick cattle, shuttered shops, and a surprising paucity of men. Not coincidentally, President Mugabe was preparing to hold a rally in nearby Murewa, about 20km away. Emboshs encountered several groups

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of Zimbabweans, perhaps 200 throughout the morning, walking towards Murewa wearing t-shirts emblazoned with Robert Mugabe's image. This region voted heavily for Mugabe's ZANU-PF party in the March 29 election. We did not see any posters or t-shirts for the Movement for Democratic Change's (MDC) Morgan Tsvangirai.

"The Geneva Convention says..."

¶6. (C) In Mutoko, scene of some of the worst recent violence in Zimbabwe, we announced our presence at the local police station; in a recent meeting with Ministry of Foreign Affairs Permanent Secretary Joey Bimha, the Ambassador had indicated that on our next fact-finding trip we would check in with police stations upon arriving at a new area. We noted a gathering on police grounds of approximately 80 people seated under a tree, some in uniform, listening to a uniformed officer. The group repeatedly raised their fists, in apparent allegiance with ZANU-PF. Although police officers in the station said it was a "monthly staff meeting," we learned afterward it was a "pep rally" to build support for ZANU-PF. Attendees included regular police officers as well as "village police," the equivalent of neighborhood watch officers.

¶7. (C) A uniformed officer emerged from the gathering and greeted the party cordially, introducing himself as the Officer-in-Charge. The Ambassador explained that we were announcing our presence in Mutoko and declined the ZRP's offer to escort or assist us. During the discussion, a man in plainclothes took over the discussion. He averred that, according to the Geneva Convention, we needed permission to travel more than 40 kilometers from Harare. Showing a diplomatic note from the MFA stating that notification to the MFA of diplomatic travel was a formality, the Ambassador said he had received assurances from Permanent Secretary Bimha that diplomatic travel was unrestricted. After personally speaking with the MFA by phone, the official relented and declared we were free to proceed. (NOTE: Our interlocutor refused to identify himself. We later established his identity as Colonel Douglas Nyikayaramba of the Zimbabwean army. He is ZANU-PF's point person in the Mutoko area and is

presumably responsible for the campaign of violence in Mutoko and the surrounding area. END NOTE.)

18. (C) Shortly after departing the police station, en route to another mission hospital just east of Mutoko, RSO noted a vehicle following the convoy. To avoid putting the hospital in danger, Ambassador McGee decided to turn around, at which point the tailing vehicle stopped as well. Driving through side streets in and after departing Mutoko, the convoy was followed by at least three different vehicles.

Food deliveries stopped

19. (SBU) Back in Mutoko, the Ambassador briefly visited a Catholic Relief Services (CRS) warehouse where USG food aid continues to be stored. Pursuant to the edict of Nicholas Goche, Minister of Public Service, Labor, and Social Welfare, CRS has ceased food deliveries in Mutoko (Ref A). A lone security guard greeted the Ambassador and told him existing food stocks are being protected.

COMMENT

110. (C) While this trip did not yield any new information on

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the violence that is now endemic in Zimbabwe, it did confirm heightened tension and police presence as well as police concern with outsiders. A local MDC official told us that before the March 29 elections, MDC president Morgan Tsvangirai had held several rallies in Mashonaland East, including Mutoko. Such rallies, the official told us, would be impossible to hold now. In fact, the MDC has indicated it may not campaign in Mashonaland East, despite the significant inroads it made in the March elections.

111. (C) The roadblocks are more heavily manned than just two weeks ago (Ref B), and it appears vehicles are under more scrutiny. In addition, it is clear that despite our having notified the MFA of the trip, word had not traveled down to the local authorities. Security is a highly localized issue in Zimbabwe, and travelers are at the mercy of local officials whose knowledge of regulations and diplomatic privileges is flimsy at best. Local officers are unaware of MFA diplomatic notes or verbal assurances that notifications to the MFA or MFA permission are unnecessary for diplomatic travel - and the MFA has shown no inclination to inform them.
END COMMENT.

McGee